



108

Greatest Of All Times

*GLOBALLY SELECTED
PERSONALITIES*

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Compiled by:
Prof Dr S Ramalingam

16 Sep 1916 <::><::><::> 11 Dec 2004

**Remembering The Queen Of Carnatic Music,
Film Actress & Singer, M S Subbulakshmi On Her
Birth Anniversary Today**



**She Was The First Musician To Win The Bharat
Ratna And Was The First Indian To Receive The
Prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award In 1974**

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16 Sep 1916



11 Dec 2004

The Queen of Carnatic Music

MS Subbulakshmi at the United Nations

<https://sriramv.com/2018/05/25/ms-subbulakshmi-at-the-united-nations/>



MS Subbulakshmi performing at the UN

M S Subbalaxmi United Nations 1966

Kindly visit the Web Link to listen the music
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gy8HGYmNIcE>

I began writing for The Hindu sometime in the 2000's. That was a series titled Encore where I picked up old news items connected with Carnatic music in The Hindu and wrote a commentary on the event itself. This was a popular column and ran almost for ten years before I gave it up, chiefly out of fear that the stories could become repetitive. Of course, I continue to write for the paper and enjoy the assignments thoroughly. But this is the first article I wrote and I can never forget the joy that I experienced, when at the Singapore airport, I went to a browsing centre and saw that it had been published.

16th September marks the birth anniversary of MS Subbulakshmi. Hers was a life of many towering achievements and among them was the concert at the United Nations in New York.

As per UN convention, a leading artiste of a member country was selected to perform on the opening day of its General Assembly session each year. MS was invited to sing in September 1965. The invite was organised by CV Narasimhan, ICS, then the Senior Under Secretary General at the UN. The Indo- Pak hostilities of 1965 however saw a tersely worded communiqué published in The Hindu that "in view of the present state of affairs in the country" Smt Subbulakshmi had cancelled her projected visit to the USA.

The invitation was repeated next year and an announcement was made on September 14th that MS would sing on October 23rd at the UN in the General Assembly Hall. The Hindu of September 15th reported that MS would undertake a seven week tour of the US, giving 15 performances between October 2nd and November 19th. MS was to leave India on September 18th and proceed to Europe where she was to perform between September 20th and October 2nd. While returning to India she was to meet Pope Paul at a private audience in Rome. The same release announced the team of accompanists, comprising Radha Viswanathan (vocal), VV Subramaniam (violin), TK Murthy (mridangam), TH Vinayakaram (ghatam) and Vijaya Rajendran (tambura). It mentioned that performances during that tour would draw on a repertoire of 60 songs including the MS trademark bhajans and devotionals.

The high profile overseas tour and the media interest it generated was unparalleled. T Sadasivam, MS' husband and mentor kept up the momentum by a series of press releases. Photo shoots of the concert team in full concert attire were organised and published. On September 18th it was announced that C Rajagopalachari had composed an English hymn for MS to sing at the UN. Set to music by Handel Manuel, Producer of

Western Music at the AIR, Madras, lyrics of the song were published on 20th September. The idea of an English song had come from Gen. Cariappa. A controversy broke out in The Hindu on 23rd September with letters questioning the English hymn. A respondent wondered if Yehudi Menuhin would ever perform a Carnatic song.

Reaching Europe, MS sang in Geneva, at the Redoute Villa in Bonn where Beethoven had once performed and then in Paris at the Guimet Museum before arriving in London on September 30th. At the Gandhi Jayanti celebrations at India House on October 2nd she sang bhajans in the presence of the Indian Ambassador, Dr. Jivaraj Mehta. The group arrived on the same day in New York where MS began her US tour comprising nine states.

On October 7th, lyrics of a hymn (maitreem bhajata) composed by the Kanchi Shankaracharya for MS to sing at the UN were published. It was set to music by noted music director Vasant Desai. MS sang it first on October 21st at the Carnegie Hall, where CV Narasimhan presented her as the "first lady of Carnatic Music".

MS suddenly lost her voice on the eve of the all important UN concert. Meditating on the Kanchi Acharya she found it restored to normalcy. On 23rd October afternoon, MS, clad in her usual "MS blue" and diamonds, mounted the stage to tumultuous applause. Sadasivam had flown in the usual circlet of jasmine and roses to adorn her hair from India. Introduced to the audience by CVN, MS held them in thrall. The Secretary General of the UN, U Thant, described it as "extraordinarily good music". MS' rendition of CR's English hymn, though applauded at the UN, came in for some scathing attacks from Indians writing in the columns of the US press.

CVN and Sadasivam had worried about the reaction of New York Times critic Harold Schornberg to MS' performance. He however praised it sky high and declared that "it would live in his memory forever". MS returned to India via London where she performed to rave reviews. On December 4th, MS returned to a warm welcome in Bombay. She was described as an "Ambassador at large" for music. "I am glad you are back home. Tell MSS we are proud of her achievement" said Dr S Radhakrishnan, President of India, in a telegram to T Sadasivam. Arriving in Madras on December 5th, MS was accorded a civic reception at the airport with the city's mayor in attendance.

It was a remarkable achievement and invokes awe even among present day jet setting musicians. But MS remained untouched by it all. She knew only her music and perhaps that is what gave her art that pristine quality which made it immortal.

India's most celebrated Carnatic singer M.S. Subbulakshmi was invited to perform at the UN General Assembly in New York on October 24th 1966 by Secretary-General U. Thant. At the time of the performance, she was already iconic in India, but largely unknown outside of the country.



[Visit this Web Link to see the Partial View of the audience at UN](https://media.un.org/photo/en/asset/oun7/oun7615364)
<https://media.un.org/photo/en/asset/oun7/oun7615364>

The memory of the performance is commemorated by a series of stamps issued by the UN Postal Administration on the 50th anniversary of the performance. Carnatic vocalist Sudha Ragunathan, herself one of the most celebrated living artists in the tradition, unveiled the stamps of M.S. Subbulakshmi's performance at the UN New York Headquarters, on the occasion of the International Day of Non-violence, October 2nd 2016.



2016, M.S. SUBBULAKSHMI PERFORMANCE AT UN HQ IN 1966

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Best of MS Subbulakshmi

M.S. Subbalakshmi was a renowned Carnatic vocalist. She was the first musician ever to be awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honor. She is the first Indian musician to receive the Ramon Magsaysay award, often considered Asia's Nobel Prize in 1974.

Kindly visit this Web Link to view the Playlist,
compiled by Saregama Carnatic Classical,
containing 499 videos in 100 links.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZYYpTrerkWzGK7-cJLXs06vnRjC6K2Qv>

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Top 50 Songs of MS Subbulakshmi

Kindly visit these Web Links to listen more than 50 songs

Top 50 songs of M.S. Subbulakshmi featuring the songs
Srimannarayan (Raga Bhowli), Brahma Kadigina
Paadamu, Nagumomu & Others

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=TqAsVni3KII&t=5707s>

Sevasadanam - Full Album | F.G. Natesa Iyer, M.S

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKObtzrHYXU> [32:30]



Cultural India

M. S. Subbulakshmi

<https://www.culturalindia.net/indian-music/classical-singers/m-s-subbulakshmi.html>

Fast Facts

Date of Birth: 16 September, 1916

Place of Birth: Madurai, Tamil Nadu

Birth Name: Kunjamma

Date of Death: 11 December, 2004

Place of Death: Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Profession: Carnatic singer

Spouse: Kalki Sadasivam

Father: Subramanialyer

Mother: Shanmu kavadiver Ammal

Awards: Bharat Ratna, Ramon Magsaysay Award, Sangeet Natak Akademi Award

Madurai Shanmukhavadiyu Subbulakshmi is a name that is synonymous with the world of Carnatic music. This flawless singer, whose voice almost had a divine power, is the first singer to be presented with India's highest civil honour, the Bharat Ratna. When she was honoured with the Ramon Magsaysay award, which is considered as Asia's Nobel

Prize, she became the first Indian musician to do so. Subbulakshmi, fondly addressed as M.S by her fans, was a true pioneer of anything that has to do with women empowerment. She led by example and showed the way to contemporary women of her era. Though she is famous as an exponent of Carnatic music, her expertise in Hindustani classical music was not short of brilliance. Subbulakshmi didn't contain herself with just music, for she forayed into the field of acting as well.



Childhood

M.S was introduced to Carnatic music at a very young age. That was because she was born into a family of musicians. While Akkammal, her grandmother, was a violinist, her mother was a well-known Veena player. Since her mother came from the devadasi community, stage shows were something M.S was used to, very early in her life. As a child, she would have numerous conversations with famous musicians like Karaikudi SambasivaIyer, Ariyakudi RamanujaIyengar and Mazhavarayanendal Subbarama Bhagavathar. This level of exposure to music and musicians made her to choose her career path at a young age.

Education

Subbulakshmi began her training under her mother Shanmu kavadiver Ammal. She then went on to learn the nuances of Carnatic music under Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer. While learning Carnatic music, she also learnt and mastered Hindustani music under the famous vocalist Pandit Narayanrao Vyas. M.S was a quick learner and thus finished her education at a young age.

Career

M.S delivered her first public performance at the famous Rockfort Temple in Tiruchirappalli when she was just eleven years old. The performance was backed by popular musicians like violinist Mysore Chowdiah and Dakshinamurthy Pillai, a well-known Mridangam player. Her major breakthrough came in the year 1929 when she performed at the Madras Music Academy. The few lucky music lovers present at the event were mesmerized by the skills of a 13 year old girl, who could sing bhajans with such grace and fluency. Impressed by her vast knowledge on music, the academy invited her for several other performances and by the time she was 17, Subbulakshmi was a major attraction in all of her concerts.

Foreign Trips

Subbulakshmi soon became an Indian ambassador for all things cultural, and represented the country in many foreign festivals. In 1963, she was invited to Scotland to take part in the famous Edinburgh International Festival. Her mesmerizing performance in the UK paved the way for her next foreign tour as she was invited to perform at the Carnegie Hall in New York. In 1982, she got an opportunity to showcase her talent at the famous Royal Albert Hall in London. Five years later, she was invited by the government of Russia to perform at the Festival of India which was held in Moscow. Subbulakshmi also travelled to places like Canada and the Far East and songs of praise just kept following her wherever she went.

A Date with Cinema

M.S also tried her hand at acting and showcased her acting skills in five movies. Her debut came in the year 1938 when she essayed the role of a young girl in the movie 'Sevasadanam'. The film was commercially and critically acclaimed and was considered a trendsetter at that time. In her second movie 'Sakuntalai', she played the title role. Her third film 'Savithiri' saw her portraying the character of Saint Narada and was appreciated for her performance.

One of her most memorable films came in the year 1945 when she once again played the title role in the movie 'Meera'. The movie was directed by American filmmaker Ellis R. Dungan and it went on to become a huge success. The versatile singer sang all the famous Meerabhajans in her melodious voice and these bhajans were thoroughly enjoyed by the audience. In 1947, 'Meera' was remade in Hindi as 'Meerabai' and this gave her true national recognition. She attained major success by

acting in films, but it did not fascinate her for a long time. She quit films and continued to focus on her music and once again started performing in concerts.

Famous Works

Some of her most famous works include 'Suprabhatam' (Early Morning Hymns), 'Bhajagovindam' (composed by Adi Shankaracharya praising Lord Krishna), 'Kurai Onrumillai' (composed by Rajagopalachari), 'Vishnu Sahasranamam', 'Hanuman Chalisa' (Prayers to Lord Hanuman), etc. Any ardent fan of Carnatic classical music is sure to have all these and much more works of M. S. Subbulakshmi. Another moving composition is the song 'Vaishnava Jana to'. Her perfect pronunciation and flawless singing would bring tears to the eyes of anyone who listens to it.

An Elite List of Fans

The great talent that M.S possessed brought a galaxy of fans. Her fan list included the likes of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Lata Mangeshkar, Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and Kishori Amonkar. Mahatma Gandhi once commented that he would rather hear Subbulakshmi utter the lyrics of the songs rather than hear someone else sing it. While Jawaharlal Nehru called her the 'Queen of Music', Bade Ghulam Ali defined her as the 'Goddess of perfect note'.

Awards

Subbulakshmi was a recipient of innumerable awards and honors. Some of them are mentioned below:

- Bharat Ratna - In the year 1998, M. S. Subbulakshmi became the first musician to be honored with India's highest civilian award.
- Ramon Magsaysay award - This award is also known as Asia's Nobel Prize. In the year 1974, M.S became the first Indian to be honored with this prestigious award.
- Sangeet Natak Akademi Award - In 1956, she became the proud recipient of this award for her contribution in the field of Carnatic music.
- Sangeetha Kalanidhi - Awarded by the Madras Music Academy, this award is considered to be the most prestigious in Carnatic music. It was bagged by her in the year 1968.
- Sangeetha Kalasikhamani - In 1975, she won this award, presented to her by the Indian Fine Arts Society.
- Kalidas Samman - In 1988, the government of Madhya Pradesh honored her with the Kalidas Samman.

- Indira Gandhi Award - She bagged this prestigious award in 1990. Presented by the government of India, this award was given to her for her efforts in national integration.

Humanitarian Works

Apart from donating most of her prize money to charity, M.S. Subbulakshmi also performed in over 200 charity concerts. From all her charity concerts, she had managed to raise more than one crore rupees which was a huge amount back then. In her lifetime, she came up with several best-selling albums, the royalties of which were donated to charity organizations.

Personal Life and Family

It is said that M.S ran away from her mother, who wanted her to marry the man of her choice. But the young singer was determined to find love instead of wealth, an idea that was far too difficult for her mother to understand. In the year 1936, she met Sadasivam, who helped her with accommodation. He even went to the extent of introducing her in the movies at his own expense. They both got married four years later in 1940. Sadasivam already had children from his first marriage. M.S treated his kids like her own and showered them with love and affection. She was affectionately called 'Amu Paati' by the kids.



Death

M. S. Subbulakshmi passed away on 11th December 2004 in Chennai. Her funeral was attended by hundreds of fans and music lovers from all over the country. Many national leaders like the then President A.P.J Abdul Kalam also paid their homage. Her mortal remain was consigned to flames with full state honors.

Legacy

In 2006, the Urban Development Authority of Tirupati installed a bronze statue of her and the same was unveiled by the then C.M of Andhra Pradesh, Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy. While a postage stamp of M.S. was issued in 2005, United Nations issued her stamps to celebrate her birth centenary. In Kancheepuram, a type of silk saree has been named after her.

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Films / Movies

[01] Savithri (1941) Tamil | Shanta Apte | M. S. Subbulakshmi | Y. V. Rao (Full Movie)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjWU-OsVfMU> [2:29:48]

[02] Meera - 1945 | Super Hit Musical Tamil Full Movie
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oB_AxZC15sc [1:53:26]

[03] Sakuntalai | M. S. Subbulakshmi, G. N. Balasubramaniam ...
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReQPALBdgXE> [2:41:52]

[04] Seva Sadan 1938
<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0274825/> [3:30:00]

[05] M S Subbulakshmi Film Hits by S.Aishwarya & S.Saundarya [1:06:38]
S.Aishwarya & S.Saundarya - Great Grand Daughters of Bharat Ratna M.S.Subbulakshmi and Grand Daughters of Dr.Radha Viswanathan present the Film Hits of MSS from her 4 films:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HQlevFzUOo>

[06] Forever A Legend (M.S.Subbulakshmi) 1
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6S0mfHEpKw> [31:27]

This biographical film on Smt. M.S. Subbulakshmi, Portrays how this ancient and glorious tradition of carnatic music, got enriched by fervent devotion and Bhakti Bhavana of Smt. M.S.Subbulakshmi and how she rose as 'A Legend Forever' and is treated with equal reverence and affection by millions of Music lovers all over the world.

[07] Forever A Legend (M.S.Subbulakshmi) 2
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OtOyMfGD10> [31:28]

[08] Forever A Legend (M.S.Subbulakshmi) 3
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eX0ImW1G52k> [31:27]

[09] Forever A Legend (M.S.Subbulakshmi) 4
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IWao8cxVRw> [15:14]

[10] Remembering M S Subbulakshmi: Silver Screen Special [19:18]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUYJHkWigag>
Remembering Bharat Ratna Smt M S Subbulakshmi on her 107th birth anniversary through her wonderful film songs!

[11] Best of M S Subbulakshmi | Sivaji Ganesan [47:04]
Immerse yourself in the golden era of Indian cinema and classical music with this captivating compilation of the best songs featuring the legendary duo, Sivaji Ganesan and M.S. Subbulakshmi.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24MWJStgWc>

Awards to MSS

Partial list of awards & titles conferred upon Smt M.S.Subbulakshmi



- | | | | |
|----------------|---|-------------|---|
| 1940 | Isai Vani, conferred by Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and Rajamaanikkam Pillai. | 1981 | Member D'Honneur, the International Music Council. |
| 1954 | Padma Bhushan. | 1981 | Desikothama, Doctoral Degree, Viswa Bharathi University, Shanthinikethan. |
| 1956 | The President's Award. | 1986 | Spirit of Freedom Award, VST Industries, Delhi. |
| 1968 | Sangeetha Kalaanidhi, the Music Academy, Madras. | 1987 | Doctor of Literature, University of Madras. |
| 1970 | Isai Perarignar, Tamil Isai Sangam, Madras. | 1988 | Trustee for Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts. |
| 1971 | Doctor of Letters, Sri Venkateswara University. | 1988 | Kaalidas Samman. |
| 1973 | Doctor of Letters, Delhi University. | 1988 | Ustaad Hafeez Ali Khan Award. |
| 1974 | The Ramon Magsaysay Award for national service. | 1990 | Indira Gandhi award for National Integration. |
| 1975 | Padma Vibhushan. | 1991 | Konarak Samman. |
| 1975 | Saptagiri Sangeetha Vidwanmani, Sri Venkateswara Thyagarajaswami Festival, Tirupathi. | 1996 | The Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar birthday award on her 80th birthday. |
| 1979 | Doctor of Literature, Indira Kalaa Sangeeth, Viswavidyalaya, Madhya Pradesh. | 1996 | The Rasika Ranjani Sabha conferred the title of 'Kala Ratna' on M S Subbulakshmi, regarded as the Queen of Music. |
| 1979-80 | Producer Emeritus, All India Radio and Doordarshan. | 1997 | Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi award. |
| 1980 | Thanipperum Kalaingnar, Tamil Nadu Iyal Isai Naataka Manram. | 1997 | Swaralaya award. |
| 1980 | Doctor of Letters, Benares Hindu University. | 1998 | Bharath Rathna, India's highest civilian honour. |



RAMON MAGSAYSAY
AWARD FOUNDATION

<https://rmaward.asia/rmawardees/subbulakshmi-m-s/>



Subbulakshmi, M. S.



1974

Citation

Exacting purists acknowledge Srimati M. S. SUBBULAKSHMI as the leading exponent of classical and semi-classical songs in the Karnataka tradition of South India. They and ordinary people alike find in the compelling melody and sweetness of her bhajans, or folk spirituals, deep, pure and abstract emotional appeal, transporting them to a sense of unity with the supreme deity. Rooted in millenia of Indian culture and mythology, her bhajans are a means of prayer and solace in the villages where bhakti marg, or the way of devotion, supersedes more intellectual philosophies.

The gift of song that reaches the hearts of her countrymen results from a passionate pursuit of artistic excellence. As a girl of 10, in the South Indian cultural center of Madurai where she was born in 1916, SUBBULAKSHMI began accompanying her celebrated mothers singing and veena playing. An enchanting voice, hard work, exacting discipline, character, humility and willingness to learn from everyone, made her at the age of 17 a soloist in her own right. When, at the age of 24, she married T. Sadasivam now publisher of the prestigious Tamil weekly, Kalki, in Madras she gained also her friend, philosopher and guide. As, with maturing years, SUBBULAKSHMI's versatility encompassed Hindustani classics of North India and folk songs of many regions, her following grew far beyond the South; wider audiences first heard her in the film Meera. Mahatma Gandhi asked only to hear her sing "*Hari Tuma Haro, or Thou God,*" on his 78th birthday, which proved tragically to be his last. Jawaharlal Nehru, after hearing her sing, said, Who am I, a mere Prime Minister, before a Queen of Song?

On tours abroad SUBBULAKSHMI sang at the Edinburgh International Music Festival and before the United Nations. Her vocal filigree, traversing three

octaves, and fidelity to tone and rhythm reached through to listeners unfamiliar with melodic Indian music that neither needs nor implies harmony. In April 1944, after five successful benefit performances given for the Memorial Fund honoring Gandhis wife, Kasturba, SUBBULAKSHMI voice became an instrument for public causes. Receipts of concert halls filled to overflowing and open amphitheatres "often packed with tens of thousands paying only four annas each (three U.S. cents) so as to deny no one the joy of her songs" have been given to constructive works. Equivalent to over one million U.S. dollars, her contributions have benefited foundations for the poor, hospitals, orphanages, schools, and music and journalism institutes. While becoming the idol of millions, this lady has remained deeply religious, unpretentious and almost childlike in her simplicity.

In electing Srimati M. S. SUBBULAKSHMI to receive the 1974 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service, the Board of Trustees recognizes her exalting rendition of devotional song and magnanimous support of numerous public causes in India over four decades.

Acceptance Speech

I feel deeply honoured to be receiving this Award and I accept the honour in all humility.

I am extremely happy to have come to this beautiful country. I find the landscape enchanting with its beach, green lawns and avenues, and the people cheerful, friendly and hospitable. I feel not only quite at home but that we are of one family.

Your great President Ramon Magsaysay was a shining personality and leader who had arisen in our midst in this part of Asia. We knew of the ideals of personal integrity, the sense of truth and justice, that he strove to establish in the short time he was your president. I offer my salutations to him. I also offer my salutations to your national hero Dr. Jose P. Rizal.

Naturally my reverential memory now hovers around Mahatma Gandhi who was the apostle of Peace on Earth, beloved Sri Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of the Indian Republic, and Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, affectionately called Rajaji. It was my singular good fortune to have come under the loving spell of all three. I offer my deepest homage to this trinity.

My all I owe to my husband, Sri T. Sadasivam. By his loving care he is my parent; by his unerring guidance he is my preceptor.

Indian music is orientated solely to the end of divine communion. If I have done something in this respect, it is entirely due to the Grace of the Almighty who has chosen my humble self as a tool. But He is beyond my gratitude. Yet, in a way, I take Him to have come within my reach in the benign personality of the Sage of Kanchi, His Holiness Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Sankaracharya, who is divinity in flesh and blood, now in his 81st year. I offer my obeisance to the Sage from the core of my being, and pray that he blesses me to deserve the honor done to me.

Once again, I wish to express to you all my deep sense of gratitude for honouring me with this Award.

MS Understood

The myths and misconceptions around MS Subbulakshmi, India's most acclaimed musician

<https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/ms-understood-ms-subbulakshmi>

TM KRISHNA

01 October, 2015

IN A PRIVATE CONVERSATION sometime in the late 1980s, a sharp-tongued young aspiring musician made an extraordinary statement about Carnatic music's most iconic figure. "MS Subbulakshmi," he said with disdain, "is the greatest hoax of the twentieth century." Many readers will leap to accuse me of blasphemy for even citing this rather obnoxious remark. But it has stayed with me ever since, and I have a somewhat severe explanation for why.

This musician's assertion was based on the argument that it was packaging and marketing that made **Madurai Shanmukhavadivu Subbulakshmi** the global face and voice of Carnatic music; her music was otherwise intrinsically hollow, and lacked "stuff." The Carnatic hinterland would not employ the word "hoax" to describe her, but would consider, with varying levels of empathy, the hypothesis that she was stage-managed. The marketing of MS—orchestrated, as is well-known—by her mentor, husband and business strategist, T Sadasivam, was undoubtedly astounding, and far ahead of its time. But to claim that what he sold to the world was intrinsically empty is unacceptable.

The world of Carnatic music, and its nerve centre, Chennai, is an intense, and intensely insular, world. Its norms of adherence, practice and evaluation are unforgiving. Through conversations, informal criticism, even hints, learned musicians and seniors, working in tandem with informed listeners, bestow various degrees of so-called classical value upon musicians. These value judgements become harsher as the popularity of a musician rises. Some of these musicians have publicly offered MS gestures of admiration, even adulation. Many use her performance techniques to enhance their own. But serious critical and technical appreciation has been rare. MS's contemporaries, and even her juniors, have received weightier musical approval.

This was as true at the crest of her fame as it is now, over a decade after her death—and in this, her centenary year. Quintessential Carnatic connoisseurs and musicians differentiate between the real *rasika*, or aesthete, and the *janata*, who attend concerts to hear merely melodious music. The only praise that the hardcore section of this small universe bestows upon MS with honesty is that she had the most beautiful and pitch-perfect voice, and immaculate presentation skills. But let me make this clear: musicians don't consider that combination a compliment. It usually means that there is nothing in the music to really write home about. I gather, from those close to her, that MS herself used to get quite upset when people only admired her voice—or worse, went on and on about the exquisite sari she was wearing.

There are also those who may want me to stop right here, because this is not the MS they venerate, a figure through whom every god spoke, and continues to speak. That MS is the voice through which Shakuntala and Meera sang. Through her renderings the works of the poet saints Tyagaraja, Kabir and Surdas came alive. Every *swara*, or note, she sang is a precious gem; every musical rendition a jewel of grace and dignity. This

MS is a divine vehicle to the deities—so divine that she has become a deity herself. This is MS as seen by people whom the aesthetes are likely to call ignoramuses and outsiders.

The narratives around MS have usually followed one of two paths. The most popular and sociologically captivating is that of the personal history. The dramatic emergence of a Brahmin musical superstar with a Devadasi background is a storyteller's dream. Comparisons with Bharatanatyam's great diva, T Balasaraswati, are inevitable: Balasaraswati, born in Chennai in 1918, stuck to her Devadasi roots, and, in fact, flaunted her antecedents.

The only praise that a hardcore section of the Carnatic universe bestows upon MS with honesty is that she had the most beautiful voice, and immaculate presentation skills. But let me make this clear: musicians don't consider that a compliment.

The second strain of writing about MS has focused on her music. This has been mostly hagiographical. Words have failed almost everyone who has tried to describe its effect, considered transporting and transcendental by many. But can we look at her life and her musical movements as a single thread, trying to understand one by the other?

Both the life and the work of MS Subbulakshmi bear investigation, to see whether it was her choices or compulsions—I use these words, which mean the opposite of each other, deliberately—that are responsible for the two differing views of her. There was a constant friction between MS's choices as an artist of great resources, and her compulsions as a woman of equal vulnerability. The early MS sang in the idiom of her inheritance, to popular acclaim. The later MS sang in the syntax of a spiritual revisionism, to popular worship. It was an extraordinary transition from what was great to what became grand.

THE BASIC FACTS that can be retrieved from the mythology surrounding MS's early life run thus: Subbulakshmi was born in Madurai in 1916 to a senior Devadasi, known and respected in the town as a veena player. In keeping with Devadasi practice, Subbulakshmi retained her mother's name, Madurai Shanmukhavadiyu, which formed her famous initials. Shanmukhavadiyu was an unwed single mother, the father of her daughter having retreated into the mists of anonymity. According to MS, he was Subramania Iyer, a Madurai-based Brahmin lawyer.



MS's mother, Madurai Shanmukhavadiyu, was a well-respected veena player of Devadasi origin. DAMKR ATHMANATHAN/TM KRISHNA

MS was introduced to the world at the age of ten, on an HMV *thattu* (in Tamil, records used to be called *thattu*, meaning plate) rendering the Tamil song 'Maragathavadivu' in raga Jenjooti. It would be unfair to judge her music at that stage, but there are some remarkable aesthetic indicators. In that recording, made in 1926, she comes across as a young girl with a sharp, brave musical expression. Her voice is already fast-moving, with the ability to render speedy phrases with aplomb. Her musical accent is natural and free; there is nothing contrived in the way her voice negotiates the twists and turns of the composition. Today, when I replay that recording, I imagine in my mind's eye a girl with oiled, plaited hair, dressed in a *pavadai-sokka*, singing with the calm nonchalance of a maestro in the making.

Her strength of character is evident in her delivery. It is the work of a tough, almost audacious aspirant, singing with abandon, knowing full well that she is exceptional. There is also the innocence of a child who probably knew of nothing but music. She sings without an iota of self-doubt.

These very qualities gave her the courage to exit her mother's vulnerable home, on Madurai's Hanumantharayar Koil Street, when she was just 20, in 1936. She left for Madras, and chose the settled rhythms of the household of T Sadasivam, a middle-class Tamil Brahmin. Sadasivam was an enterprising advertising manager for the celebrated Tamil magazine *Ananda Vikatan*, and a close friend of its famous editor, Krishnamurthy. Sadasivam was deeply involved in the Indian independence movement, and both he and Krishnamurthy were devoted adherents of C Rajagopalachari, the Tamil statesman whom Mohandas Gandhi referred to as his conscience-keeper.

MS had briefly met Sadasivam on an earlier visit to Madras, when she had performed at the city's renowned Music Academy. Now, upon her return, she was undoubtedly seeking Sadasivam's protection, taking a huge risk by placing herself in the hands of a man she hardly knew. That she did so with conviction is quite astonishing. Theirs became a partnership of two very independent and strong individuals. Each knew what he or she wanted, and knew, too, the potential of the other.

Shanmukhavadvu had done all that she could to advance her daughter's career opportunities, but MS had outgrown her environment in Madurai. Madras was becoming the hub for all things Carnatic, and MS's thirst for music was certainly as compelling a reason for her move as the obvious fantasy of making it big.

Sadasivam, for his part, was a married man when he started to provide shelter to the young Devadasi from Madurai. I am certain the conservative expression *ellarum yenna sholluva?*—"what will people say?"—flashed across his mind. Apart from his love and affection for her, and beyond his progressive zeal, Sadasivam probably saw musical greatness in MS, and knew he had to be by her side.

The musical voice is a complex phenomenon. Just as every person speaks at her own pace, every musician has a range of speed at which her voice is most comfortable. A vocalist's musicality emerges from physiological as well as psychological traits; each voice is unique in its malleability. This does not remain constant even within an individual musician's practice, however. Musical maturity, and the wear and tear on the vocal muscles, leads to unconscious adjustments to her thoughts and actions. Nevertheless, unless some serious damage occurs to her voice, any change in a singer's musical direction is likely to be in the form of a progression.



MS was introduced to the world as a ten-year-old, singing the Tamil song 'Maragathavadivu' on an HMV record. ROLI BOOKS

MS's music in the early years of her stardom is a continuance of what we hear in the voice of the ten-year-old. She had what we would call a *briga* voice, a voice that could render a musical phrase fast, irrespective of its complexity, with precision, elan and finesse. Her renditions moved with great accuracy without ever compromising on musical definition. There was no apparent conscious effort, no contrived intellectualisation—this aesthetic seemed second nature to her.

There was something in her singing then that was very avant-garde, stylish, modern and carefree. This should not be taken to mean it was free of care, but free of fear—that is, the fear of going wrong or falling short. Her style had a quality that was fleet but not hasty, quick of movement but not jerky. The modern and the avant-garde are, after all, born from unbound flight: musicians achieve the most elusive artistry when they reach out for the high skies without a second thought.

Her early recordings create the impression of a very contemporary young musician, liberal and feminist, who didn't care a damn for what people thought. This attitude, as others have observed, is well in keeping with the Devadasi tradition of music. Artists of Devadasi origin had to be, if anything, supremely assertive and artistically self-confident, in a bid to protect their lives from exploitation as far as possible. They were not to be fooled around with, or taken for casual performers. In aesthetic terms, this meant their work was to be respected; they were to be given time and space to perform, to create that unmarked zone in which they were sovereign. There is a clear streak of a non-patriarchal, non-conservative musical democracy born out of the organic nature of Devadasi learning.

Her early recordings create the impression of a very contemporary young musician, liberal and feminist, who didn't care a damn for what people thought. This attitude is well in keeping with the Devadasi tradition of music.

But MS's music was strikingly different even from that of the dominant Devadasi musical tradition in Madras, from the school of the legendary Vina Dhanammal, who rose to prominence at the turn of the twentieth century. This music was slower, with a focus on softer curves and gentler phraseology, with intricate aural filigree. For the Carnatic community, the Dhanammal variety of music later propagated by her grandchildren—T Brinda, T Mukta and T Vishwanathan—has come to be accepted as the universal representation of the Devadasi tradition. We seem to have forgotten that Devadasi

homes nurtured diverse ideas of musical aesthetics, but the early MS reminds us of this reality.

There are also musical reasons for the difference of texture. Some of MS's biographers, including the journalist TJS George, have speculated that her father may have been the star musician Madurai Pushpavanam, a contemporary of Shanmukhavadiyu's, said to have had a very racy and dynamic interpretation of Carnatic music. It is at least possible that MS heard about his approach from her mother. Shanmukhavadiyu herself seems to have taught MS music that packed a punch. And then there was GN Balasubramaniam, or GNB, as he came to be called—a dashing musician six years older than MS, whom we now know she not only admired, but was also infatuated with. The feeling was mutual, as evident from the fact that he kept all her love letters safe until the end of his life.

GNB's love for MS has been underplayed, thanks to the latent patriarchy of Mylapore, the Brahmin neighbourhood at the heart of Chennai where music and temple rituals merge like the warp and weft of Kanjeevaram silk. By the late 1930s, GNB had revolutionised the tone, thought, and method of rendering Carnatic music. He brought into its practice a kind of Western analytics, which is often attributed to the fact that he was the first Carnatic musician of note who was also a college graduate—he took an honours degree in English literature.

GNB had a magical voice. Unprecedentedly, he sounded most Carnatic when he sang at stunning speeds. All of a sudden, this genius had given the music an exciting, youthful expression, and he became all the rage among Madras's young upper classes. MS's music from this period through to the 1950s sounds akin to GNB's sound. This was probably the result of her conscious internalisation of his music, as well as his subconscious impact.



On the day of Meera's release, fans thronged theatres to see and listen to the young Subbulakshmi in the lead role. COURTESY MATRKA/TM KRISHNA

MS and GNB can be said to have collaborated, although not in the sense that they sang

together regularly. In 1940, both starred in the film *Sakuntala*, in which GNB played the king Dushyanta, and MS his love, Shakuntala. Their duets in this film bear testimony to my observations. If anyone could match him, phrase for phrase, it was MS. I am certain that anything he might have thrown at her, she would have given back with interest. In colloquial Carnatic parlance, we would use the Tamil phrase *sangati ellaam palapalapalannu vizhum*, meaning that her sangatis, or musical phrases, unfurl with clarity and lustre. There are no approximations or sly escapisms in MS's execution. Her voice and her music are perfectly paired—and propelled by her tenacity.

There is a 78-rpm recording, released around this period, on which MS sings a brief *alapana*—a kind of improvisational form—of raga Harikamboji. Just before concluding it, she sings a sparkling, ascending musical phrase that is utterly GNB-esque. I bring it up to highlight just how razor-sharp and adventurous her music was, and not superficial by any standard. This is exactly what we would say about GNB, too.

BY MID 1940, MS had become a name to reckon with, both as a singer on the rigorous stage, and as an actor on the fluid screen. Both roles were complementary; on both, she became, quite simply, a star. In July that year, she and Sadasivam were married, after the passing away of Sadasivam's wife. It marked the officialisation of their relationship, and the point after which everything began to change.

What happened next can be called the transformation, or the psychological realignment, even the taming, of Subbulakshmi. The free-spirited young woman was to become the embodiment of the ideal Brahmin housewife, seen among the elite as the epitome of purity and devotion.

The patriarchy that surrounded the Carnatic world governed every aspect of MS and Sadasivam's social and cultural life. Sadasivam's politics were emancipatory, but he was personally a conservative patriarch. He was instrumental in choreographing MS's transformation. She may have wanted the legitimacy that came with it herself, of course. The security of social respect and acceptance among the cultural elite was probably important to her.

MS's own baggage was her life and past in Madurai, and the contrast between it and being with Sadasivam. On the practical side of things, she was aware that Sadasivam knew exactly what to do professionally. She was on the verge of something really big, and he was, after all, a master of marketing. *Ananda Vikatan* had reaped the benefits of his savvy; so would *Kalki*, a popular Tamil magazine he had promoted with his friend "Kalki" Krishnamurthy.

For MS's transformation to occur, the social memory of her had to be redrafted, and then filled in with new details, which meant MS had to be redesigned, both in image and in music. We can see clearly how MS's style changed just from her attire. Gone were the puffed sleeves and casual saris. Even more dramatically, gone was the MS of that early, fun photograph in which she is pictured with a young Balasaraswati, in Western-style sleeping suit, sporting an unlit cigarette in her mouth. We can now only visualise her in conservative *smarta-brahminkattu*, the style in which she draped her sari.

Between 1938 and 1947, MS acted in five movies: *Sevasadanam*, *Sakuntala*, *Savitri*, *Meera* in Tamil, and *Meera* in Hindi. In those early years, it was the norm for south Indian films to star Carnatic musicians, as they depended heavily on their music for success. Her movie career was also a business endeavour for MS. She played

Narada in Savitri to raise money for the launch of Kalki. Then came Meera, a point of inflection in the lives of Sadasivam and MS.

There are two sides to the Meera story, one personal and the other professional. Close associates of MS have said that her experience of playing the title role was deeply emotional, even spiritual. In her mind, she had become the "dasi Meera," the poet saint known and revered across India, and that connection would never leave her. Professionally, of course, Meera was a national success, launching a small-town south Indian singer into the headlines. For the first time, a Carnatic musician was recognised in the corridors of power up north. Political and corporate leaders bowed before MS now, and she became known by the titles conferred on her by Jawaharlal Nehru—"the Queen of Song"—and by the nationalist and poet Sarojini Naidu, who, it is claimed, said she surrendered her own title to MS—"the Nightingale of India." They and the general public must have seen echoes of MS's experience of transcendence in the role—the feeling of actualising Meera in herself.

But this was only the beginning. In what turned out to be a brilliant marketing move, Sadasivam ensured that MS never acted again, thus etching the image of Meera forever on the frame of MS. After 1947, I don't believe MS ever presented a concert that did not feature Meera's bhajans. The decision to drop out of cinema also erased a potential conflict: a woman becoming the perfect Brahmin housewife could not, after all, also remain in the film industry without creating contradictory images. Ending that chapter of her life only further established MS's Mylaporean conformism.



Subbulakshmi, (right) went a long way from the young woman seen clowning here with the Bharatanatyam dancer T Balasaraswati. COURTESY T BALASARASWATI ARCHIVE

THERE WAS, HOWEVER, more to this transformation. Just a decade after Meera, MS's aesthetic transition was clearly visible. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, her concert tours across India had become processional, like Dasara in Mysore. They were great events, replete with social celebration and musical rejoicing. Here, the striking changes in her music are first discerned in the texture of her voice. It starts sounding heavier, even a little suppressed, as though forced into containment. Musically, the carefree

abandon disappears. She still does sing those beautiful "runs," but they sound more structured. All of a sudden, the kite is tied down by a heavy boulder.

Some may argue that this was the result of Subbulakshmi's maturing, but I beg to differ. In the maturing of a musician, the spirit behind her music is not manipulated. With MS, there seems to have been a kind of reverse engineering: the core was dislocated in order to accommodate the realignment of mind and voice. After Meera, and her becoming a quasi-saint across India, her music had to reflect her new status.

We cannot pass judgement on matters of personal faith. But the change unquestionably affected MS's music. She did not stop at Meera bhajans; encouraged by her husband, she acquired and recorded a wider repertoire of religious music, including the work of Tulsidas, Kabir, Nanak, Surdas and Tukaram. She also learned Rabindrasangeet. She acquired many identities in her music. When in Kolkata, she was Tagore. In Pune, she brought Tukaram to life. In Delhi, Tulsidas was reincarnated. On her home turf, in Madras, Tyagaraja sang through her.

Being all these characters was not just about surrendering personally to a godhead or philosophy. It also meant that she was reorienting the aesthetics of her art. It is one thing to learn an assortment of compositions, completely another to have to perpetually juggle musical approaches. MS was intensely involved in every work she rendered, which meant giving up something of herself to its composer, form and intent.



Her fame and her husband's connections with independent India's elite led to MS singing at innumerable concerts, big and small. In 1967, she sang at Teen Murti House, Delhi, to commemorate the death anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru. BCCL

She was also simultaneously updating her Carnatic repertoire and expression. She learned from many greats, including KS Narayanaswamy, and, before him, Musiri and Semmangudi." It is said that a leading musician from Madurai, a member of the Isai Vellalar community, once remarked that MS used to sing beautifully until she came under the tutelage of two Iyers. The story is unsubstantiated, but even concocted tales can reveal something of the inner workings of the environment that produced them. It points to the underlying friction between communities in the Carnatic world. As a musician, I can only interpret it to mean that the musician felt sparkle and spirit had given way to predictability.

MS loved to sing, and to learn more and more music, whether it was Carnatic, Hindustani or even—unfortunately—English. In 1966, she was given 'Here Under This Uniting Roof' to sing at the United Nations on the occasion of UN Day. The song was written by C Rajagopalachari and tuned by the respected Chennai-based Western classical musician Handel Manuel. But whatever the value in their contributions, the song was musically hollow, and aesthetically limp. Did these frequent shifts cause any internal conflict? Did MS view all these roles as one and the same, or was she painting and peeling identities constantly? We cannot know how she reconciled the contradictions within herself.

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Still, her expanded repertoire demands recognition for one astounding quality. Even as MS was singing songs of great diversity, she had the capacity to prevent each from being marred by the aesthetic dimensions of the other. Never was her rendition of a Muthuswami Dikshitar composition, muddled by the musicality of Rabindrasangeet; nor her offering of a Meera bhajan by lapses into the heaviness of the Carnatic accent.

This was a tremendous achievement, but one that has gone entirely unnoticed. Her hopscotch between genres gave her music a stronger emotive layering. People may have complained about MS's accented Hindi, but they adored her music, its mellifluousness and its sanctity. In the eyes of the public, she became the spiritual heir to the rishis of this land, or even something more, perhaps: the goddess Saraswati incarnate.

FAME HAD ITS REPURCUSSIONS in the inner world of Carnatic music, where MS's national positioning began to skew people's perceptions. She was soon thought of as a bhajan singer, which led to a certain amount of trivialisation. For a serious musician of any form, respect from her own contemporaries, seniors and connoisseurs is essential. By the time MS received the coveted title of Sangita Kalanidhi from the Madras Music Academy in 1968, that respect, paradoxically, had begun to dwindle.

Even after Meera, MS's concerts contained all the elements that would pass muster with the Carnatic world. She presented many rare compositions, such as Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer's magnum opus, the Melaragamalika. She rendered numerous ragam-tanam-pallavis—three-part improvisational presentations, considered the greatest test of a Carnatic musician's abilities—set to challenging tala structures, in chaste Carnatic ragas such as Begada, Todi and Bhairavi. Very rarely was she applauded for them. It was most unjust, but the ragam-tanam-pallavis were simply drowned out by bhajans such as 'Morey to Giridhara Gopala.'

I will say that it was MS who increased the importance of what we call the tukkada, or ostensibly lighter section of a Carnatic recital, which follows the virtuoso performance. In the minds of rasikas, the focus of MS's concerts moved away from the first two hours of art music to the last half-hour of tukkadas, during which she sang devotional music. She rendered every piece with great beauty, but listeners became obsessed with the religiosity of the shorter pieces, and forgot her musical acumen. Even her rendering of serious Carnatic compositions began to be received by many listeners as some form of divine deliverance.

MS's contemporary DK Pattammal was the first Brahmin woman to become a celebrated concert performer. In particular, Pattammal was considered a master of the ragam-tanam-pallavi. This conferred on her the status of being, somehow, equal to men in the eyes of Carnatic musicians and connoisseurs. She also uncovered many unknown

compositions by Muthuswami Dikshitar, but, unlike MS, she was constantly lauded for these and other efforts by the critical core of the musical world. This must have really hurt MS.

The release in 1963 of MS's recording of the Venkateshwara Suprabhatham was a popular coup. But it was musical free-fall as far as the serious listener was concerned. This, however, did not prevent MS from continuing to release many recordings in the religious and devotional genres. I am certain Sadasivam knew of the rasikas' perceptions of these. He may not have cared, since by now MS had escaped the clutches of Mylapore. But we may not be able to say the same of MS's feelings.

Sadasivam's control over MS and her music was not only that of a producer; he was also her director and screenplay writer. It was he who decided which ragas and compositions to present at any concert, and even stipulated the duration of each rendition. She also received instructions from him during concerts. The worst of these interruptions would occur when someone of importance was part of the audience. MS would be deep in the Carnatic idiom, preparing to elaborate a raga, when Sadasivam would suddenly ask her to render, say, a Surdas bhajan. The reason: some Hindi-speaking dignitary was leaving early, and would not be present to hear her sing the bhajan towards the end of the concert. Those who knew the workings of MS's mind during her concerts have told me that this irked her no end.



Sadasivam's household, which included his daughters Radha (left) and Vijaya, represented stability and security to MS. BCCL

These manipulations affected both her own flow, and the image of Carnatic music itself, since she was its best-known symbol. Stipulating the duration of an interpretation is not prudent planning. In fact, it dismantles the essence of what drives not just music, but every creative art. A concert's balance is calibrated by an invisible inner gauge that an artist develops over time. Each concert is an experience in itself; every composition or improvisation is born from the creative impulse of the day. To destroy this was simply another way of belittling MS's musicianship. It is quite unfathomable that an artist of MS's calibre was tied down by rules set by a non-musician, even if it was her own husband.

To top it all, there was the Shankarabharanam quagmire. If ever a person can be said to have epitomised a raga, MS epitomised raga Shankarabharanam. It is said that Sadasivam invariably wanted her to present it as the main feature of her concerts, believing that this would lead to the success of the performance. MS would gently protest now and again, expressing a desire to sing perhaps the Bhairavi or Saveri ragas instead, only to be vetoed.

Ragas such as Shankarabharanam and Kamboji possess the swara, known as anthara gandhara, a sharper variety of the swara we sing as "ga." Anthara gandhara can be used as an anchor in the higher octave, especially while rendering the alapana. Using it as a sustained note, an artist can weave multiple phrases, particularly in faster speeds, leading to a theatrical climax. In MS's music, almost every time, as she ended her dramatic explorations at the anthara gandhara, she sang a final flourish that took her to the panchama (the swara "pa") in the higher octave. This always won applause.

Perhaps Sadasivam's fascination with Shankarabharanam came from its capacity to generate applause, rather than any real musical feeling for it. It led to the perception that MS was incapable of rendering other ragas with the same ease as she did Shankarabharanam. She changed the kirtana that she presented in the raga every time, but some listeners began to grow bored. Everyone forgot that her interpretations of Anandabhairavi or Kharaharapriya were just as gorgeous.

A fundamentally more serious charge was levelled against her creativity. Many Carnatic musicians and rasikas will say that MS's improvisations were rehearsed and pre-planned; that she was a mere reciter. At face value, this rings true. There is no doubt that her alapanas, nerava and kalpanaswaras—all types of improvisational techniques—operated within a frame, and with a kind of route map already drawn within the outlines. She was certainly not a creative genius of the order of, say, the nagaswara maestro TN Rajaratnam Pillai.

But the truth is more nuanced. This did not mean that every alapana MS sang was a photocopy of a previous rendition. It is worth noting, too, that others of great repute have followed the same custom no less assiduously. The improvisations of Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, the godfather of twentieth-century Carnatic music, also adhered to a plan and structure. There was most certainly ideational repetitiveness in his performances. But I have rarely heard anyone bravely proclaim that he lacked the creative spirit. Instead, Ariyakudi is revered as the "Margadarshi," or path-finder. No musician would dare question his abilities. Musicians such as DK Jayaraman and KV Narayanaswamy also followed templates, but their music is seen as spontaneous, in-depth and thoughtful.

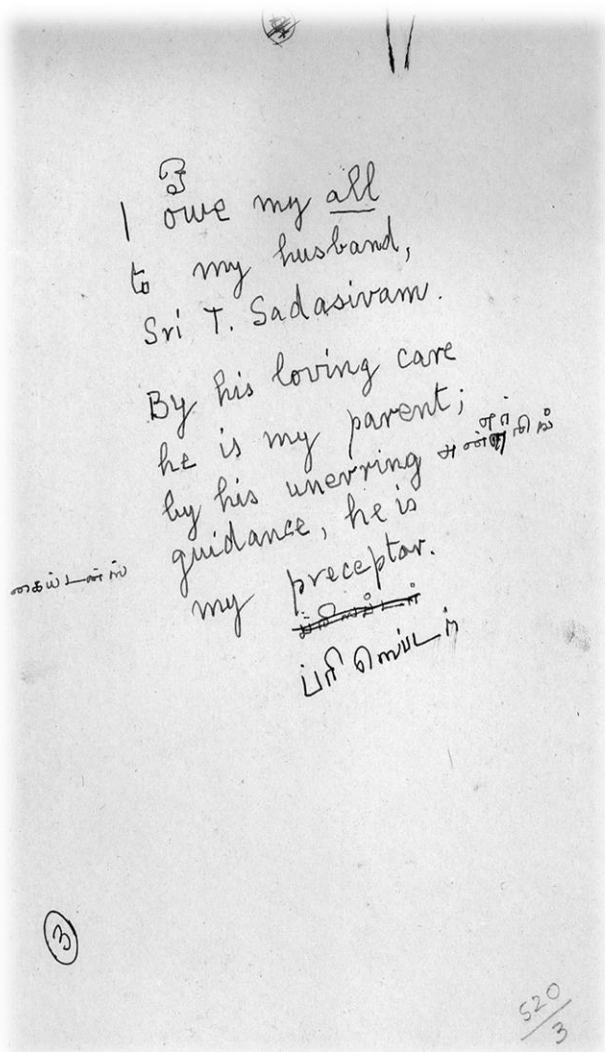
MS was, and is, an easy target. She was often considered more of a parakeet than a nightingale, though her alapanas, neraval and tanam renditions were free-flowing and intuitive. There was never any indication of artificiality in her vocalisation, or in its creative development. I would argue that the same cannot be said of DK Pattammal, the critics' favourite, whose alapanas were creatively limited, and whose articulation was laboured. Rasikas do not complain about this.

A third front of criticism had to do with the fact that MS practiced regularly with her accompanists. Customarily, Carnatic musicians do not sit together and practice; they meet on stage. In fact, such rehearsals are scorned: the assumption is that musicians

who require them are incapable of creativity on the fly. But MS and her team practiced extensively, and the overall effect in performance was impeccable.

This was especially evident in the 1960s, when her accompanying musicians were VV Subramaniam on the violin, TK Murthy on the mridangam, V Nagarajan on the kanjira and Vikku Vinayakaram on the ghatam. Listening to this team can sometimes give the impression that there are three human voices: that of MS, of her step-daughter Radha, who provided vocal support, and of VV Subramaniam's violin. The percussionists always seem to know exactly how to respond to every movement in the melody.

While devotees of MS will argue that the rehearsals only enhanced the listening experience, I must accept that there is some weight to this criticism, since, to my mind, there is a flaw in this conception of what is perfect. MS sought a unified, error-free concert presentation, and accomplished that. Whether that made her concerts great art is another question. The experience of life, after all, is not one of correctness. Perfection is the search for the pure, experiential quality born from surrendering oneself to art. The artist gives her all, and stumbles upon perfection by accident. It is quite possible that there will be moments of technical imperfection in that process. Yet, when such perfection is attained, it takes us beyond the personal to the abstract.



MS's sense of what she owed to her husband are captured in her notes for a speech, undated. She copied some of the English words into Tamil to get their pronunciation right. COURTESY

MATRKA/TM KRISHNA

MS was willing to sing a song a hundred times if needed, and she did. Her moments of ethereality came in spite of this, not because of it.

But what was behind this obsession with practice? Over time, MS had come to represent a flawless human being, and become, in the public eye, a haloed personality, complete in every sense. Her graceful saris, her measured words, her hairdo, even the way flowers adorned it—everything was perfect. South Indian Brahmin women began to emulate the MS demeanour. The music of such a blemish-less person had, of course, to be mistake-free. A false note from MS was unimaginable. There could not be a stumble, let alone a fall. Her concerts had to be as impeccable as her personality. Repeated practice was the best way to achieve this.



COURTESY MATRKA/TM KRISHNA

MS never tired of it: she was willing to sing a song a hundred times if needed, and she did. Her moments of ethereality came in spite of this, not because of it. Throughout her musical life, there were unmonitored moments in which the MS of Madurai made a guest appearance, stunning us with a phrase that illuminated the horizon, like a flash of lightning over the open seas. If the initial freedom heard in her music is anything to go by, we may well have witnessed spectacular creativity from her if she had been allowed to just be.

by 1970, MS had been singing for nearly four decades. She was also constantly doing what someone or the other expected of her, rather than what her genius expected of her. The songs she sang on stage were always meant to please some constituency. Her singing itself was about satisfying what her husband saw as music. She had become mother, woman-saint, deliverer and model, as well as singer.

Sadasivam was a man of great integrity and self-respect, but he submitted himself to the political and corporate hierarchies of the time. His long and close association with Rajagopalachari, and his involvement in the latter's Swatantra Party, drew him into many circles of power. MS was constantly singing, both informally and formally, at gatherings organised by her husband, either in their own large residence, Kalki Gardens, or at those of others in their circle. Every so often, it was to please or felicitate visiting bigwigs from elsewhere in India or abroad.

No count exists of the number of such performances; they must run to several hundred. I wonder what the musician in her felt about these indulgences. I don't have an answer,

but I can speak as a musician myself: such concerts most certainly belittle the seriousness of music. I am referring not to spontaneous renditions of a song, but to situations in which MS's art was taken for granted.

By the 1980s, she had toured and been honoured across the globe. She had sung at the United Nations. She received the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1974. In 1998, she was awarded India's highest civilian decoration, the Bharat Ratna, becoming the first musician to receive that recognition. It would have pleased Sadasivam immensely, but he was no more by the time she received it. The Carnatic community may have criticised her art, but it had to accept her stardom and offer her recognition, even if murmurs about her musical ability continued. Since unabashed adulation had come from the outside, she received grudging acceptance from within.

But in all this, where was MS? Did she even know where to find herself? These are difficult questions, and I do not raise them as an insider who was privy to her personal life. A musician's personality is revealed from the music she offers us. In MS's case, the signals were all too confusing. Her sincerity was unquestionable, yet there seemed to be so many acts and facades. These were not put on to cheat her listeners; she internalised her roles to such an extent that she was subsumed within them.

It is unanimously agreed that MS was a kind, humble human being, who bore no one any malice. She was soft-spoken, and never rude. Her laughter occasionally lit up a room. But she was also a mystery. Access to her was restricted. The outside world knew nothing of her musical process. We may never know how deeply she thought about her music.

MS was certainly not a tortured soul, but there was a sadness in her, and I think it may have emanated mainly from the restrictions on her musical life. I am not saying that she did not love all that she sang, but she knew that it was not on her terms. She knew, moreover, that she would die without getting her real due from the Carnatic world. It was in singing bhajans and thumris that she received approbation, but it was in the kirtanas, padams, thillanas, varnams, viruthams and javalis—all types of Carnatic composition—that she sought validation.

SET EVERYTHING ELSE aside for a moment, and try and inhabit the "MS space"—where an intangible, intense, deeply moving moment arises, and takes your breath away. There is something there that comes from the depth of a partnership between the singer and the sung, the two in a union that is both private and open for all to hear and witness. When MS sang with all her being, which was invariably the case, she sang with her eyes closed, lost to us.

What was she? What did she find? I have dissected her music, even said that she performed to please others, and gave herself up to do what her husband said. I am now saying something that contradicts all that—or am I? Once engulfed by the music, an artist finds a freedom and openness within, even if everything constructed on the exterior is limiting. So is there more to the "divine MS" experience?

I have struggled with this question for a very long time, because the power of MS's music is irreplaceable, and incomparable. I have one probable answer. I do believe she was unable to be fully herself. The scaffolding around her was Sadasivam's construction, and she had to remain within it, grateful for the security that it provided. Musically, too, she was locked in a vault. But when she sang, forgetting everything around her, all her suppressed sadness, regrets and experience burst into music.

Once in a great while, we experience an unadulterated sense of what is real, so tender and vulnerable that our fences break down when it touches us, and we see ourselves like never before. MS, more than any other musician, can gift us these moments of self-realisation.

It is this honest and pure outpouring that still shakes us. Her art was MS's only outlet. Every time she sang, she allowed every moment of her life experience to imbue the melody, letting go of all her inhibitions, abstracting herself into the raga. Once in a great while, we experience an unadulterated sense of what is real, so tender and vulnerable that our fences break down when it touches us, and we see ourselves like never before. MS, more than any other musician, can gift us these moments of self-realisation.

She is an unsolved mystery to me. Every time I engage with the idea of her, a new strand appears. Her life and history is open to many interpretations. Since she herself said so little about it, we can only grapple with third-person narratives, and use her music as a window into who she was. Her emotions were bundled up so tightly that even her closest friends and family saw only glimpses of her inner struggles, each one taking away his or her own personal impression like a private trophy.

She was determined, strong, focussed, committed, and brave. She was also introspective, innocent, and fragile. The Carnatic world, for its part, has simplified her music and boxed it into either of two categories: the celestial, or the ordinary. But her music was both, and everything that lies in between. She, and her music, will never cease to bewitch us. They will only ever continue to raise the unanswered question about where the real MS resides.

An earlier version of this essay incorrectly suggested that the magazine Kalki was active in 1940. The magazine was founded in 1941. The Caravan regrets the error.

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Chronology

<https://pedia.desibantu.com/m-s-subbulakshmi-her-chronology/>

M.S. Subbulakshmi – Her Chronology (1916 – 2004)

Published on February 14, 2013

1916-1940



M.S's Birth Place

- **M.S. Subbulakshmi** was born on 16th September, 1916 in the temple town of Madurai and her initials M.S. record the birth place and mother's name Shanmukhavadiyu. She had two siblings, brother Saktivel who was 2 ½ years elder and sister Vadivambal was 6 years younger.

1926 –Debut at the Age of 10:



Shanmugavadiyu

- On her mother's request, she gave debut performance at the age of 10 years, at **Madurai** Sethupati High School by singing a Marathi song, Anand Ja. About her first performance, and the situation which lead her to give performance in her words-
"The first stage appearance ? When it happened, I felt only annoyance at being yanked from my favorite game – making mud pies. Someone picked me up, dusted my hands and skirt, and carried me to the nearby Sethupati School where my mother was playing before 50 to 100 people. In those days that was the usual concert attendance.

At mother's bidding I sang a couple of songs. I was too young for the smiles and the claps to mean much. I was thinking more of returning to the mud"

1926 – First Recording:



Young Subbulakshmi with thick curls and a puff sleeve blouse

- M.S. Subbulakshmi had her first recording with the song Maragatha Vadivum (Raga : Chenchurutti), while her mother Shanmugavadivu was playing veena.

1920"s –Memories:

- Lost in memories, Subbulakshmi's narrative trumbles. Those were times to recall with tears she was blessed by every senior musician who came home to sing and play before or listen to her musician mother Shanmukhavadvu playing the veena. Some were legendary figures like Tirukkodikaval Krishna Iyer, Veena Seshanna of Mysore, Ponnuswamy Pillai, Naina Pillai, Chittoor Subramaniam Pillai, Venkataramana Dass of Vizianagaram. Invariably, Kunjamma would be jerked forward to sing.



"Though I was always encouraged and appreciated by them, I never lost my timidity." She recalls that some of them would teach her a song or two – as did the great Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar

"What were you like in those days?" brings a change of mood. *You can see it in the old pictures,"* she laughs. *"A side parting in thick curls pressed down with lots of oil, a huge dot covering most of my forehead, the half saree pinned to the puff-sleeved blouse with long brooch and longer safety pin, eardrops, nose-rings and bangles of imitation gold... Oh, I forgot. The long plait was tied up with a banana stem strip! Or a ribbon! Which never matched "*

1933 – First concert at the age of 17:



M.S. Subbulakshmi in Chennai

- M.S. Subbulakshmi's first concert at Music Academy, Chennai took place in a miserable situation. She filled in for an ailing Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar.

Of her debut at the Madras Music Academy when she was 17 –

- a connoisseur wrote: "When she, with her mother by her side (who played the tambura for the daughter), as a winsome girl in her teens, ascended the dais in 1934 and burst into classical songs, experienced musicians of the top rank vied with one another in expressing their delight in this new find."
- Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar came forward with loud hyperboles. Tiger Varadachariar nodded approval.
- Karaikudi Sambasiva Iyer was to say later: "Child, you carry the veena in your throat."

Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer:

- Subbulakshmi assimilated her vast repertoire from many sources, she always acknowledged the late Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer as her guru. Semmangudi's acquaintance with M.S.' husband, T. Sadasivam, began with their serving as judges in the 'khadi' section of the swadeshi exhibition during the Mahamakham festival at Kumbakonam in 1933. Semmangudi claimed not only M.S. but also Sadasivam as his disciple, having taught him to play cards. At times he even joined M.S.'s concert tours – as Sadasivam's rummy crony.

1935 – at the age of 19:



M.S at the age of 19

- "Kunjamma (as she is known to those close to her), brought up with all the rigorous strictness that her mother could impose upon her training in art as in life, had sung at a wedding in the household of Dakshinamurti Pillai, the venerable percussionist from Pudukkottai. The event had drawn a galaxy of artists – including the upcoming Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, Musiri Subramania Iyer, Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar, Rajamanickam Pillai, Rajaratnam Pillai, Palghat Mani Iyer, G.N. Balasubramanian and the Alathur brothers.
- The next day, in the midst of this starry assembly, Dakshinamurti Pillai suddenly smote his head with vehemence. "Andavane!" (oh God!) How will you save your throats for a lifetime if you engage in vocal gymnastics? Leave all that to us drummers. Singers must emphasise the raga and the bhava so that you preserve your voice and let it gain in timbre. That little girl there, she knows this already. Didn't we hear her yesterday? Wasn't

it satisfying? Touch our hearts?"" At that public praise, Kunjamma shrank even more behind her mother in the corner. "



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**An Early Picture of
MS and Sadasivam**

Meets Sadasivam for the first time when he comes for a photo shoot related to the Ananda Vikatan Deepavali Malar

1938 – Role of an Actress at the age of 22:



M.S in Sevasadan

- Subrahmanyam introduced a number of artists to a career in films, foremost among them being the Carnatic music stalwart M.S. Subbulakshmi. Seva Sadhanam championed the cause of women's equality. Based on a novel by Premchand, the film was a bitter attack on the dowry system, which often compels poor young girls to marry older men. The film forcefully discussed the havoc caused by the incompatibility between such couples and sympathised with the victims. Subrahmanyam introduced M.S. Subbulakshmi as an actress in the film, which was a big success.

1940 – 'Isai Vani' award at the age of 24:



with radha and others

Isai Vani, conferred by Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and Kumbakonam Rajamanikkam Pillai.

July 10, 1940:

- The artiste needed someone to regulate and channelize her talents. She found that person in T.Sadasivam and married him on 10th july 1940 at Thiruneermalai, Madras. It was a turning point in her life. She got in her husband a friend, philosopher and guide.

Her husband impressed on her that Bhava should blend with Bhakthi in music. He impressed on her that she must learn the correct pronunciation and meaning in any song.

1941-1950

1941 – Interaction with film industry

Title role in 'Sakuntala' movie:

- The finest film of 1941 was perhaps Ellis R Dungan's Sakunthalai, produced by Chandraprabha Cinetone. M. S. Subbulakshmi, on her way to becoming a legend, played the title role. She was no great actor, but her beauty, rare charisma and fascinating voice impressed everyone without exception. G. N. Balasubramaniam, another legend of the Indian music world, played King Dushyanta of Hastinapuri. Not surprisingly, Sakunthalai had many songs. Notable among them are 'Anandhamen solvanen', 'Sukumaara', 'Enthan idathu tholum' and duets with GNB, 'Premayil' and 'Manamohana anangey'

Role as Sage Narada in 'Savitri'



As Sage Narada

- M.S. Subbulakshmi, played a male role as Sage Narada in a mythological movie Savitri, which attracted considerable attention and became talk of the town. Savitri had many songs, mostly sung by her. A magazine named Kalki was founded from the funds of this movie.
- Meets Chinani Mami (Narayani Mahadevan) who becomes a lifelong friend.
- Move to Kalki Gardens at 20 Guruswamy Mudaliar Road, formerly called Sladen Gardens."Enraptured by tales of the Mahatma's walks outdoors and councils indoors, T.Sadasivam had bought Sladen Gardens from Mammen Mappillai, through the agency of 'Aryabhavan' Sharma, to house the Kalki magazine. The first floor became his home.

1944-Beneficial concert for Kasturba Memorial fund



With Mahatma Gandhi

- T.S. and M.S. made it a habit to give all she received to charitable causes. It all began with Rajaji's request to M.S. to give five benefit recitals for the Kasturba Memorial Fund. Conveying his gratitude, Gandhiji himself wrote a letter thanking her.

1945 -Acted in the Film 'Meera'



M.S in the film Meera

- The Indian film musical classic, "Meera" (1945) produced by Chandraprabha Cinetone and directed by Ellis R. Dungan is one of the most memorable milestone movies in the history of Indian cinema. Even after nearly sixty years this film is vividly etched in public memory, and its songs and MS as Meera, are evergreen in the minds, hearts and souls of Indians, especially in the south of Vindyas. With MS in the lead role, others in the cast were Chittoor V. Nagaiah as King Rana, Meera's husband, K. R. Chellam, K.Sarangapani, T. S. Balaiah, Serukalathur Sama, T. S. Durairaj, `Appa' K. Duraiswami, `Baby' Radha (MS's step-daughter, now Radha Viswanathan), `Baby' Kamala, and in a minor role, lost behind a white bushy beard, turban and all, M. G. Ramachandran! Not many are aware that the noted singing-star from Karnataka, C. Honnappa Bhagavathar was the first choice to play King Rana. On second thoughts V. Nagaiah was brought on board.
- "Meera" was a musical feast with MS singing almost all the songs. Many songs became hits and the most famous of them all, "Kaatrinile Varum Geetham" (lyric-Kalki) is an immortal melody of Indian cinema.

1945 -'Meera' Released

- "Meera" was released on Deepavali Day in 1945. Two years later, the Hindi version came out in 1947, and with it MS became a national celebrity.

1947 – At the age of 31

- Hindi version of Meera came out in 1947
- The film had an on-screen introduction by the noted politician and poet, Sarojini Naidu, who described MS as `The Nightingale of India'.
- The film was seen by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Mountbattens and other leaders who became her ardent fans and friends. She went on to conquer new areas around the world and became an international celebrity.
- Bharathanatyam program by Anandhi (daughter of Kalki Krishnamurthi) and Radha. The two were a very popular dance duo with music sung by none other than M.S. Subbulakshmi. You will see that during this pre-independence event the nationalist leanings of the Kalki and Sadasivam families is seen in the selection of the Bharathiar song "Aaduvome".

1951-1960

1954 – At the age 38



M.S At Rajbhavan

- M.S. Subbulakshmi was awarded **Padma Bhushan** at Rajbhavan, Chennai, which is the third highest civilian award in the Republic of India,
1955 – Age 39



MS meets Helen Keller

- A music recital by Subbulakshmi in aid of the Kamala Nehru Memorial Hospital Fund.
- Benefit Concert for Madras Music Academy Building Fund

1956 – Age 40

Received Sangeet Natak Academy Award

1962 -Mother Passes away

Aug 05: Mother Shanmugavadivu passes away



1963 -First international Concert



Concert trip to Edenburg

- The Edinburgh Festival became the first step towards international acclaim for Balasaraswati (which made her better known in India!) Subbulakshmi's voice knew no cultural barriers. Though she was not going to undertake many foreign trips, after the Edinburgh experience she would win accolades from world celebrities – whether the Queen of England or the Pope at the Vatican; and musicians everywhere, Yehudi Menuhin, Om Kulsum, Zubin Mehta.

Album with Venkatesha Suprabhatam released:

- Her first full-length album for the Gramophone Company of India (GCI), which was recorded over 40 years ago, still manages to sell over 2 lakh copies every year. The album – 'Sri Venkateswara Suprabhatam,' which is a wake-up call for Lord Venkateswara – was recorded in 1963 by GCI, Saregama India's earlier avatar, in the LP (or long playing) format. The company says it manages to sell at least 15,000 cassettes and CDs

each month in South India, with between 2,000 and 3,000 more coming from the rest of the country.

1966 – UN Concert Tour:



Concert in UN

- She did her first concert in US, accompanying with Radha Viswanathan-vocal, V.V. Subramaniam – violin, T.K. Murthy -mridangam,, T.H. Vinayakaram-ghatam. She mesmerized the audience with these kritis.
- Kanchadalayadakshi
- Panthuvrali Alapana
- Priye Charu Sheele – Ashtapadi

1967 –

- Received Ravindra Bharathi Cultural Academy Award

1968 – 'Sangeetha Kalanidhi'

- M.S. Subbulakshmi was the first female recipient of 'Sangita Kalanidhi Award' which was instituted by The Hindu from 79th Conference.



Sangita_kalanidhi



M.S. as Sangeetha Kalanidhi



M.S's speech

1970 –

- Isai Periarinar Virudhu conferred on MS by Tamil Isai Sangam



•
Album Cover Page

Vishnu Sahasranamam & Bhaja Govindam Album released

Album details:

- Label:-Odeon---S/MOAE-5011
- Format:-Vinyl,-LP,-Stereo-
- Country:-India
- Released:-
- Genre:-Classical,-Folk,-World,-&-Country
- Style:-Carnatic
- **Track List**A1-
- A1-Talk-By-RajajiVoice---Sri-C.-Rajagopalachari*
- A2-Bhaja-Govindam
- A3-Vishnu-Sahasranamam—Dhyanam
- B-Vishnu-Sahasranamam—Stotram
- Accompanied By Smt Radha Viswanathan and Vocals – M.S. Subbulakshmi

1974 – The Ramon Magsasey Award:

- In electing Smt M.S. Subbulakshmi to receive the 1974 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service, the Board of Trustees recognizes her exalting rendition of devotional song and magnanimous support of numerous public causes in India over four decades.



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Receiving the Ramon Magsaysay Award



At the Philippines

"I feel deeply honored to be receiving this Award and I accept the honor in all humility. I am extremely happy to have come to this beautiful country. I find the landscape enchanting with its beach, green lawns and avenues, and the people cheerful, friendly and hospitable. I feel not only quite at home but that we are of one family. Your great President Ramon Magsaysay was a shining personality and leader who had arisen in our midst in this part of Asia. We knew of the ideals of personal integrity, the sense of truth and justice, that he strove to establish in the short time he was your president. I offer my salutations to him. I also offer my salutations to your national hero Dr. Jos P. Rizal. Naturally my reverential memory now hovers around Mahatma Gandhi who was the apostle of Peace on Earth, beloved Sri Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of the Indian Republic, and Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, affectionately called Rajaji. It was my singular good fortune to have come under the loving spell of all three. I offer my deepest homage to this trinity. My all I owe to my husband, Sri T. Sadasivam. By his loving care he is my parent; by his unerring guidance he is my preceptor. Indian music is orientated solely to the end of divine communion. If I have done something in this respect, it is entirely due to the Grace of the Almighty who has chosen my humble self as a tool. But He is beyond my gratitude. Yet, in a way, I take Him to have come within my reach in the benign personality of the Sage of Kanchi, His Holiness Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Sankaracharya, who is divinity in flesh and blood, now in his 81st year. I offer my obeisance to the Sage from the core of my being, and pray that he bless me to deserve the honor done to me. Once again, I wish to express to you all my deep sense of gratitude for honoring me with this Award".

- Elected Fellow of the Sangeet Natak Academy



MS with the other recipients of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship in 1974

1975 –

- Was awarded with Padma Vibushan
- Honored as Tirumala Tirupathi Devasathanam's Aasthanam Vidwan
- TTD Starts to broadcast M.S. Subbulakshmi's Venkateshwara Suprabhatam at the temple

1976 –

- Benefit Concert for Prime Minister's National Relief Fund

1977 –

- Coast to Coast Tour of USA to raise funds for Hindu Temples in New York and Pittsburgh.



- ## 1979 –

- ## 1980 –



Past Forward

M.S. Subbulakshmi's Annamacharya Pancharatna Album released

- Childhood details enumerated in the book Past Forward as told to her grand niece Gowri Ramnarayan.

1981 –

- Asthana Vidushi by Andhra Pradesh Govt
- Desikottama from Viswa Bharati University in Shantiniketan
- Elected Membre d'honneur by the UNESCO sponsored international Music Council

1982 –

- M.S. Subbulakshmi traveled to London, New York, Canada, the Far East, and other places as India's cultural ambassador. Her concert 'Festival of India' was organized at the Royal Albert Hall, London in 1982

1983-

- **Sankara Netralaya Benefit Concert:**

- An old lady donating her savings to a cause rather than to the temple at Tirupathi; the numerous benefit concerts rendered by the legendary MS Subbulakshmi in aid of Sankara Nethralaya; a bereaved father setting up an institute at Sankara Nethralaya in memory of his son.

1988 –

- Honoured with Kalidas Samman award by the Government of Madhya Pradesh.
- **Festival of India at Moscow** – in the year 1988, at Rachmaninoff Hall, Moscow. M. S. Subbulakshmi sung a resonant Kalyani, with the nuanced depth that would move a die-hard Mylapore connoisseur. But the packed hall of Russian listeners, some of them experts in western music as performers, scholars and students, were mesmerized by the vocal magic. To most of them, that was the first exposure to Indian, and certainly Carnatic music. During a pause, a woman came up to the stage to offer flowers, with tears spilling down her cheeks. There was rapt silence for the two hours of the recital. Then a roar of thunder. The standing ovation continued, the applauding listeners followed the artiste as she made her way out of the hall, down the staircase, and into the car on the street.

1990-

- The Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration.

1997 –



M.S. and Sadasivam

Last public concert at Music Academy

- Swaralaya Puraskar
- Husband T.Sadasivam passes away

1998 –

- M.S. Subbulakshmi received the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honor. She was the first musician to receive the award.

2003 –

- Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer Passes away.

2004 –

- Jun 21, 2004 -Lifetime Achievement Award : The Delhi Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit, conferred the "Lifetime Achievement Award" on renowned vocalist and Bharat Ratna recipient, M.S. Subbulakshmi.

The Nightingale goes dumb forever:

- The doyen of Carnatic music M S Subbulakshmi demised in Chennai on 11th December, 2004, of broncho pneumonia and cardiac irregularities, according to hospital and family sources. She was 88.



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